

***“Planning Amherst Together”***  
**Community Forum**  
Thursday, June 16, 2005  
7:00 – 8:30 P.M.  
Grace Church Parish Hall, Spring Street  
Transcription of Notes from Discussion Groups  
Revised: 7/25/05

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Purposes:

1. Participants understand the focus of this “Plan the Master Plan” phase
  2. Participants provide guidance regarding what would make the Master Plan worthwhile
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Upon arriving, each participant was asked to write answers on note cards to the following questions:

**What’s the most important thing the Amherst Master Plan could accomplish?**

**What would you like to ask other townspeople that would help us plan for the future?**

*[Answers received appear on separate transcription]*

**Notes from Small Discussion Groups**

**What would you like to ask other townspeople that would help us plan for the future?**

*Group #1 [Joanne Levenson scribe]*

We need to focus

We need compromise and respect

Why are we fearful of profit-driven projects?

Why do we think Amherst is so unique?

Do we feel safe [women, young people, ACIANA (?) community] and make people feel connected?

How can you express an opinion if you don’t feel safe?

Can we keep on growing? How can we stop growth without harming people?

Lord Jeffrey’s small pox legacy – does it hang over the town?

What do you like about the town?

Feel comfortable as home and community with a bi-racial family.

*Group #2 [Niels la Cour scribe]*

What are your needs and concerns in the town? [worries]

Would you be willing to sacrifice your neighborhood interests for a good of the town as a whole?

If you had a small grocery or hardware store in your neighborhood, would you do your shopping there?

How concerned are you about adding more agricultural land preservation?

How important is economic development to you, and are you willing to pay higher taxes to preserve land?

What do you feel are the major economic [financial] problems relating to living here, and how do those affect you?

Why do you think it’s necessary to bring business/industry to town?

How important is it that the people in government meetings do reflect our diversity and our class structure?

Would you be willing to switch from auto to public transit? If there were a more robust public transit system, would you use it?

How do you think the aging population will affect our community?

Group #3 [Alan Root scribe]

How would you make sure that people including those working on the Master Plan base their suggestions on facts rather than personal opinions?

Have you familiarized yourself with the current zoning including the zoning map before suggesting changes?

On what specific parts of town should the Master Plan focus?

What changes would you make in the structure and style of our present government?

How can we pay for town services and still maintain open space?

What goals for affordable housing?

How would you break down barriers between people with specific reference to class... elitism... race... ethnicity... and similar considerations?

How would you create real diversity on town committees?

How can we get you interested in Amherst's future?

How do you separate your own personal views of Amherst's future from how you perceive the overall town sees Amherst's future?

What would you sacrifice in your own lifestyle for the benefit of Amherst's future and sustainability?

Are you really sufficiently involved in our Amherst community?

Group #4 [Jackie Wolf scribe]

How do we go about and how do we attain the kind of Amherst we want?

What is most important to your well-being: preservation of natural places or business development?

How important is well-being of Amherst's trees?

What businesses do you think would make it in Amherst and also be welcomed by the community?

How can we get better mass transit in Amherst? [small vehicles?]

Where are the wetlands in Amherst, and where can we build?

How can we have more bussing for disabled people in town?

Can Amherst increase daily activities downtown for "almost" senior citizens?

How do we keep our local business in Amherst?

Group #5 [Molly Turner scribe]

Did you drive here?

How most affect quality of life?

How to sustain quality schools?

What should business sector look like?

What about Amherst would like to lose least?

How aware of are you of limited resource, and how does this awareness affect how you live [the choices you make]?

How many live near public transit?

How much do you value historic resources, and what are you willing to do to preserve them?

Group #6 [Cynthia Brubaker scribe]

What town function are essential, which are valuable, which are nice?

How can we get diversity in town affairs?

Are you active in town activities, and which ones?

What are you willing to sacrifice to improve Amherst

What kind of community do you think this is, and what is important to you to keep you here?

What's the downtown of downtown? How can we accomplish it?

How can we keep the quality of life high and keep our taxes down?  
How can we make civility, diversity, harmony?

Group #7 [Bill Gillen scribe]

What is really important I town that you cannot live without?  
How easy it is for you to pay real estate taxes?  
How important is variety of people?  
How important are the arts and arts organizations?  
Where do you spend time in town?  
What will you housing needs be for the next 20 years?  
How much do you value quiet?  
Are you open to change?  
If you plan to stay in Amherst, why?  
How do you think we should pay the bills for town services? How to fund the town?  
What business and retail functions do you leave Amherst for?  
What are your thoughts on a pedestrian mall downtown?

Group #8 [Walter Wolnik scribe]

How large a population should Amherst have, and where should they be?  
What basic services are missing, and where should they be?  
What growth should occur as each new segment of the sewer is added?  
How should we deal with the structural deficit? Severe cuts? More development? Raise taxes?  
What do you envision for the center of town, given the inevitability of growth?  
What people think of sidewalks and pedestrian access?  
How work together for harmonious problem solutions  
What will be consequences of not planning?  
What are obstacles to reducing auto use?  
What do about traffic?  
What can we learn from other communities?

Group #9 [Bob Grose scribe]

How do they see us?  
How do we attract business?  
Where do you see flexibility?  
What can we pre-plan?  
What are we confused about?  
Is planning too complicated?  
What is our order of priorities of values? [How do we assign value?]  
Whom should we ask?  
What needs have priority for the future?  
How can we be flexible and adaptable?  
What do people not like about Amherst?  
How will we adjust to the evolving future?  
How can I contribute?

## What brought you to Amherst? Why did you choose to stay here?

### Group #1

Came to attend school, landscape, cultural advantages

Unusual ?] it was culturally progressive

Midwest transplant, wonder how we came about with our peculiar characteristics

Wonderful schools, people care, seems to be striving to do our best in whatever we endeavor to do.

Support for excellence.

Need to harness energy

Need a variety of housing types

### Group #2

Came here for education system. 3 kids with special need

Lived in small, small town; wanted cultural diversity at bigger cities, without their problems.

Moved to the area to work in Amherst, then moved into Amherst because the social structure fit our life better.

Graduate school originally, but adopted children from India: cultural diversity

Post doctorate @ Amherst College

Lived in cities, came to school, stayed: cultural diversity for small town

Scenery

Job – stayed because of scenery & cultural diversity

Small town setting – political atmosphere

Graduate school. Husband is European, wanted American town with cultural diversity.

### Group #3

Disliked schools in Somerville... preferred Amherst education and W. Mass.

Husband works at Amherst College... many benefits to living in Amherst

After 10 years working in civil rights movement... moved to Amherst with new focus on environmental concerns

Cultural opportunities... good bus service

Job opportunities... good place to raise kids

Attracted to small town with diversity... college town atmosphere

Good schools and democratic politics... colleges here

Born here with early life on farm at Amherst/Hadley border... committed to area

Started marriage in Amherst. Returned to area where earlier generations of family lived, starting in 1654

### Group #4

<u>What brought you here?</u>	<u>Why did you stay here?</u>
Relationship	Co-housing community
Apprentice to potter	Kids in school, multi-cultural diversity
Liked community/job	Happy, people-friendly. Walk downtown and bike downtown
Family ties. Affordable housing	Good for progressive pol [??] work
Came as a student	Bi-racial family and cultural life. Values of people in town. Diversity
Jobs [University]. Fell in love with Town common, diversity	Accepting attitude, diversity, culture, entertainment, beauty of [indsc??]
School system	Comfortable, like meeting people up town

### Group #5

Schools

Picture post card

Mix of landscape, culture, and job plus diversity

Amherst College – came back for landscape, cultural activities & utopian spirit

Adoptive family lives here, summer vacations here as a teenager. Stay for intellectual community life and liberal democracy

Friends who lived here, stay for hopes, sustainability, atmosphere different from rest of country, small town atmosphere

Born here 1992, stay because no choice, but like the small town and nice schools

### Group #6

Came for college and came back for political atmosphere

Came for a job & finish a degree and loved it for raising a family – especially bookshops.

Came from Montana for a job, want to move east. Loved it, stayed.

Job at University, loved the area, especially the political climate, involvement of citizens, pretty environment.

Went to school here, came to love the environment, then the intellectual community.

Followed a woman who got a job at UMass, love the politics, want to stay here.

Deep roots, second generation, rural area, farm [horses]

Husband's job brought me in 1996, seems better than most other places we've lived in. Safe good for raising kids, educational system.

### Group #7

Access to quality education

Environment

Came for a graduate degree

Rural flavor and access to culture

The "smallest" place to live without a car – want to live without a car

A town that enjoys its eccentrics

Live and work in town

Family members came to live here, and it is a great town

### Group #8

To retire: 5 colleges & natural environment

Dissatisfaction with Long Island & experience of life in Denmark

For better education and dad got new job

Got job at UMass, able to walk to work and school

Work brought here, kids education, got to live in house with cows nearby

Retirement, after 4 years in Ashfield, attracted by culture and natural beauty, and that's why I stay

Came to UMass for school, haven't left since not graduated yet

Get out of city and raise kids. Combination of culture and country, stayed for schools.

Lifestyle choice. Expectations met

195 – best job offer was UMass, stayed in retirement because of sense of community very strong.

Been very active in town activities. Left-leaning political attitude

### Group #9

Came 42 years ago. My father's background. A challenge but a fascinating community. Always something in Amherst.

My wife got her master's degree. We raised our kids. We liked a small town.

Came to UMass in 1979. Grew to love the town. Made close friends. Enjoyed it.

Wanted daughter to grow up in a small town. Did not like Boston

30 years ago. Preferred a place a lot warmer than St. Paul, Minnesota. Liked a rural community but for an African American, a small town not good.  
Came in 80s. Can't sell house. Married.  
21 years ago to start business. Live in one and in another. I enjoy it. Winters not so good.  
Amherst Bulletin in Georgia. Liked the Bulletin. Bring up children. Interesting people.

**What 3 changes would make your daily life here more enjoyable or successful?**

Group #1

Healing from the charter "war"  
Need more commercial services downtown  
Reduction in volume of traffic, slowing the traffic down  
Better and more flexible public transportation [Boulder, Nairobi] & using vans not just buses  
More bicycle friendly, town assisted carpooling  
Broaden the tax base  
Coherent zoning  
Traffic lights on a different cycle  
Business [\_\_\_?] incentives

Group #2

Grocery store/hardware store downtown, so don't have to drive. Neighborhood shopping  
Diversity more a part of our lives. Have better integration at all levels, not just in schools.  
Need translators at meetings  
Look at design of traffic flow, and improve/incorporate public transit [thinking about a complete traffic assessment and plan]  
Better public transit to help people without cars get places, to meetings, etc.  
Change zoning to help facilitate home businesses; some places don't allow it. How does zoning affect town?  
Change zoning to get more mixed use, more complex use.  
Movie theater  
More robust downtown instead of going to Northampton  
Thorough review of zoning  
More parking downtown or more transportation to downtown  
Big amazing recreation center for ages birth to 100 that everyone can afford, meeting rooms as well as recreation  
Lower rent prices

Group #3

New downtown shopping attractions  
Elimination of racism, class-based entitlements and other social barriers  
Downtown businesses that better reflect needs of permanent residents as compared to college and university students  
Places for teenagers to hang out  
Peripheral parking lots with buses to reduce automobile traffic downtown  
Maintenance of Amherst's distinct personality  
Stabilizing state & federal supports to reduce worries over increasing non-affordability of Amherst  
More recreation opportunities across town  
Pocket parks in sub-divisions  
Expand bicycle riding opportunities  
Permanent Visitors Center downtown in Kendrick Park  
Chamber of Commerce needs to be more accessible  
Lower downtown rents

Enforced lower speed limits for traffic calming  
New sidewalks across town  
Better access to Bike trail  
Overhaul public schools curricula  
Downtown playground on north side of Common  
Graduated property taxes under local options to existing state law

#### Group #4

Better transportation. More open space with walking trails and picnic places  
Transportation to all neighborhoods, business development in village center or centralized places, downtown with non-corporate business!  
No chain stores allowed, supermarket & hardware downtown, safe bicycling-fewer cars, more trees planted  
Get rid of CVS in downtown [chain stores, avoid duplication], grocery downtown, transportation  
More jobs in town, more businesses in town  
Cultural opportunities for people in neighborhoods to get together  
Easier way to get to town for disabled people, teen space in town, affordable housing in town, colleges and university policing their own students, more student housing on campus  
Thermometer next to town clock, school services open to adult community [woodworking shop]

#### Group #5

Improve transportation, public transport local and regional, parking. Create more local good jobs, not restaurants. More realistic about our schools and that we have the same problems  
Improve management of UMass transit, maintenance public relations, attitudes of drivers, routes. Better traffic control – lights. Better traffic enforcement, both for us and as revenue enhancement.  
Supervised teen center. Better bike lanes and paths – connected. Neighborhood gathering spaces. More mid-range housing. Better connecting trail and path system in residential areas. Bike path over Holyoke Range. Reexamine complacency about economic and social diversity.  
Connecting sidewalks from outlying areas. Public transport to outlying areas. Increase jobs – deep pool of better quality, decent jobs.  
More separated bike transport—segregated travel corridors. Less power to business. Car-free downtown, pedestrian zone.  
More public transport for other communities. Enforce speed laws along Route 9. Less fast food, less litter.  
[group conversation dealt with sustainability issues and also with traffic calming]

#### Group #6

Movies in downtown Amherst.  
Comprehensive plan people could rely on – agreement on what is going to do somewhere and accept it when change comes.  
Remember what business we're in: education – where we house them that is acceptable to townspeople.  
Fewer cars, grocery store in town center, and village centers.  
Public transportation that can be counted on  
Village center idea – commercial components  
Nothing major –keep open space  
Open up communications with groups in town who don't participate much  
Workers in town – how to communicate with their needs and keep them here  
Students don't feel integrated, neither do minorities. How to do that better  
Feel cut off from downtown area because I live on the outskirts – more open paths, good interconnections throughout town

Need a park on the east side [Logtown Road]

Diversity is good, wish it weren't so divisive, we need to include minority groups, listen to their needs

Education is our main economic source. It is a big draw and we need to keep it strong

Can the University teach students to be good citizens of the community?

Tax burden concerns. Diversifying the tax base and broadening it

#### Group #7

Create a pedestrian-friendly and business-friendly downtown

Keep all open space in Amherst

Basic needs by downtown businesses: clothing, grocery

More funding for the arts

Cut real estate taxes in half

Town/gown relationship should change so we get more benefit of their existence

More jobs

We should get more money from the large institutions

Live and work in Amherst

UMass might house their alums and staff

Protection from increasing taxes so elderly are not taxed out of town

#### Group #8

Natural gas to Leverett Road

Would like more jobs

Misses comprehensive public transportation

More bike trails and lanes on roads [Pine Street]

Mixed use development business/housing

Lower property taxes

More tolerant of different points of view

Downtown turned into walking street

Use business zones [PRP] as actual tax base

Improve education, increase agriculture, clear up traffic [make more bike trails]

More appreciation/support for downtown businesses, support so we get the services we need

Reduce conflicts with bikes on Main Street especially, and in low light

Bus access remain high

Clear bike ways, especially on busy streets

More businesses downtown

#### Group #9

All 3 = moving the transfer station out of my back yard.

Leave cars back home. Human scale.

Best teaching. I like kids.

More small businesses. More affordable housing.

Fewer McMansions, a moratorium needed. Authentic questions and a true dialogue about our life together. Wind energy.

Viewshed control; avoiding selfish vanity. Pedestrian Focus. Trolley system.

Small business. Cleaner air. Increasing walking.